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UHP TEACHES TEENS WINTER DRIVING SKILLS ON SNOW & ICE

Troopers use snowmaking equipment to add a new dimension to teen driving program

Lehi, Utah – With a grant from the Ford Motor Company, the Utah Highway Patrol has been making snow on the Emergency Vehicle Operations course in order to teach teens how to be better drivers in wintry conditions.

The UHP's goal for the program is to give teens experience in winter driving conditions in a controlled environment. "For the great majority of teens, the first time they experience driving on snow and ice is when they're out there on public roads with the rest of us," said UHP Sgt. Greg Holley, who created the program. "By encouraging them to experience vehicle dynamics on snow and ice on a closed course, we hope to teach them how to react appropriately in a snowy or icy situation without panicking."

To ensure they had enough snow at the EVO course, troopers used a Polecat snow gun, normally used at ski resorts, to make snow. Many dry days in January and above normal temperatures in February have presented challenges, but the troopers were able to cover the course with thick layers of snow and ice. They then groomed it and created a course designed to incorporate a little bit of everything that teens might experience on the road. The course includes serpentine and slalom sections where teens practice steering, braking and accelerating on snow and ice, so they can learn how a car will act and react in a variety of situations.

"Our main emphasis is for the teens to avoid crashing in the first place," Sgt. Holley said. "But on the snowy and icy course, we get them to think about what they'll do if they lose control, so they'll be prepared to anticipate what the car will do and react if they can't avoid a situation."

The course on Saturday, February 22, 2014, is the last of four classes the UHP will hold this winter. Teens from around the state have attended the classes, and Sgt. Holley reports their feedback about the course has been positive. "They're telling us they they've learned to not overcorrect and are saying they've loved the experience of driving on the snow," Sgt. Holley said. "They're also telling us they're going to share the information they've learned with their family and friends, which is great."

Sgt. Holley started the Teen Driving Challenge in 2009 after learning about a similar program in Kentucky. Since then, more than 400 teens have attended the course and many have later contacted the officers to let them know they've used the skills they learned to avoid a crash. A grant from the Ford Motor Company's Driving Skills for Life (Ford DSFL) program and the Governor's Highway Safety Association (GHSA) provided the funding for the snowmaking equipment so the UHP could add the winter driving component to the classes.

For more information about the classes, contact Sgt. Greg Holley at gholley@utah.gov or 801-440-7829

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